

Research on the Professional Development of Rural Primary School Teachers: Current Situation, Reasons, and Countermeasures

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Abstract: Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, rural education has made significant progress. The conditions for running rural schools have significantly improved, and the professional development level of rural teachers continues to improve. All of this is thanks to the policy support and financial investment of the Party Central Committee and the State Council for rural schools. However, through research, it has been found that although the professional development level of rural primary school teachers is constantly improving, there is still a significant gap in the professional development level of urban and rural teachers. The specific reasons are: rural primary school teachers have weak awareness of professional development and insufficient abilities; Insufficient policy support from the government and education administrative departments; Rural primary schools do not attach enough importance to the professional development of teachers. In response to this, rural teachers should enhance their awareness of independent professional development and enhance their professional literacy; Establish a lifelong learning concept and cultivate learning abilities. The government and education administrative departments should increase policy and financial support for rural schools. Rural schools should attach importance to the professional development of teachers and carry out various teaching and research activities.

1. Introduction

Since the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the entry threshold for teachers has been increasing. The problems of private teachers becoming regular teachers and their children taking over their positions in the past no longer exist. New teachers must obtain a professional qualification certificate before they can participate in teacher recruitment exams held by various regions. Only those who pass the written examination, interview, physical examination, and political review can smoothly enter the education system and become formal teachers.^[1] These processes generally require high comprehensive qualities and abilities of teachers, thus ensuring the professional quality of new teachers. In addition, due to the fact that the recruitment examination time, batches, and content of schools in urban and rural areas are all the same, candidates only voluntarily choose to apply to their desired schools based on their actual situation.

Therefore, there has been a phenomenon where the scores of candidates from rural schools are much higher than those from schools in urban areas. This also indirectly reflects that the current source of new rural primary school teachers is not poor, and some may even have higher quality levels than urban teachers. Of course, in addition to the high standards and strict requirements for new teachers, the Party and the state also attach great importance to the vocational training of existing in-service teachers in rural areas. Almost every year, this is fully reflected in the "National Training Plan", provincial-level and county-level training, as well as online teacher continuing education training. Based on the above analysis, it can be seen that the quality level of rural teachers has significantly improved compared to the past.

2. Analysis of the Reasons for the Current Situation of Professional Development of Rural Primary School Teachers

2.1 Rural primary school teachers lack a strong sense of professional development

Rural school teachers do not attach enough importance to their professional development issues. Perhaps new teachers will also have a strong passion for work and want to do everything well and achieve results in the present. But after working for a few years, this enthusiasm will soon be worn away. Some teachers become too passive and muddle along all day, becoming monks and hitting the clock every day. There are many reasons why their professional development awareness is not strong, but the most important reason is the lack of stable material and spiritual incentive mechanisms, lack of room for improvement, resulting in insufficient work enthusiasm and enthusiasm, and insufficient internal drive.^[2] Doing well and doing poorly is the same, as is doing more and less. Over time, people's laziness will breed and spread, and they will choose to let themselves go and choose a more comfortable and comfortable way of working. Many rural schools do not value material and spiritual incentives for teachers, while some schools, even if they have incentive measures, often have the opposite effect due to unfair evaluation and distribution methods. For example, the distribution of performance-based wages and after-school service fees, as well as the awarding of various honors and the allocation of training quotas. In the daily work of these schools, if teachers do not feel fair, they will inevitably lose their initiative and enthusiasm, thereby weakening their professional development awareness.

2.2 Insufficient professional development ability of rural primary school teachers

Another main internal reason for the low level of professional development of rural primary school teachers is their insufficient abilities. In fact, except for free normal students from affiliated normal universities or graduates who have performed exceptionally well during their school years, the source of new teachers has not shown much difference. The reason why there will be gaps in the future is due to the limitations of opportunities and platforms. The composition of teachers in rural schools is relatively complex. The personnel who are recruited through teacher recruitment are generally young teachers, and they do not show significant differences in their ability levels compared to urban teachers at the beginning of their employment. However, due to a long-term lack of platforms and opportunities for self-improvement, many teachers have been unable to elevate their professional development level to a new level during critical periods. Over time, if you want to improve yourself again, you will appear to have insufficient abilities and lack stamina. However, for normal school students who are assigned jobs upon graduation, due to their long-term teaching work, their teaching concepts and thinking methods have become more standardized, and their professional development abilities have almost reached the limits they believe. If they want to continue improving, they face more difficulties than young teachers. Nowadays, the former "three types of students" are also the

main force of rural primary school teachers. The government has allocated almost all three types of students to rural schools. Their professional development level is directly related to the quality of education in rural schools. Due to some of them not engaging in teaching work after graduation, there may be issues with insufficient experience or abilities. To change this phenomenon is not an overnight effort, and it requires long-term efforts from teachers themselves and the school.

2.3 Insufficient policy support from the government and education administrative departments

From a macro perspective, the long-term existence of the urban-rural dual structure makes it difficult for rural school teachers to continuously access high-quality educational resources and achieve stable and sustainable professional development. From an intermediate perspective, insufficient policy support from local governments and education administrative departments is also a major reason for the low level of professional development of rural school teachers. Rural schools themselves rely heavily on policy support for their development due to their insufficient strength. However, the allocation of funds for rural schools will be limited, so various favorable policies from the government and education departments aimed at improving school conditions will definitely not be implemented in these rural schools. Over time, a vicious cycle has formed, with the stronger and weaker ones becoming weaker, severely hindering the further development of rural schools. A rural school principal said that he had also complained when he met with leaders and related personnel from government departments and education administrative departments. The other party has also expressed sympathy and even specifically asked someone to write down the difficulties the school is facing now, so that they can take it back and study it carefully. But even when school leaders are full of expectations and hope for some positive changes, these things often go unnoticed, and they have gone through countless disappointments in this way.^[3] Moreover, due to the small number of students in rural schools, the opportunities and quotas for teachers to participate in training will be limited. Many high-level training programs, such as small-scale rural schools, do not have training slots. Sometimes, even if there is one, it will only be limited to one person. This causes rural school teachers to sometimes miss out on many opportunities for learning, communication, and broadening their horizons. As a result, rural school teachers have fewer opportunities and platforms for professional development compared to urban school teachers. After delving into the reasons behind these phenomena, it ultimately comes down to insufficient policy support and financial support from the government and education administrative departments. Therefore, it is imperative to continue to increase funding and policy assistance for rural schools.

2.4 Rural primary schools do not attach enough importance to the professional development of teachers

From a micro perspective, rural primary schools generally do not pay enough attention to the issue of teacher professional development. Teacher professional development is a long and persistent task. Rural school leaders are limited by funding and conditions, and lack patience and ability to invest a lot of manpower, material resources, and financial resources to support this work that is difficult to see results in the short term. Currently, the rotation of principals in rural schools is relatively frequent, so these principals know that they will not stay in the school for a long time, so they do not have the patience and energy to cultivate teachers. This attitude tendency is manifested in many aspects, such as neglecting school teaching work and only seeking stability. Rural school leaders do not like to carry out various teaching and research activities in schools and they are not willing to allow teachers to travel for training in other places. Of course, it is still very willing to hold teaching and research activities between schools or within the entire region. Because this is a rare opportunity to showcase the characteristics and strength of the school, regardless of which school it is held in, it is an honor

for that school. However, this type of teaching and research activity sometimes places too much emphasis on form, appearing to be more formal than content. Apart from such intercollegiate and large-scale teaching and research activities, school-based training within the school is quite rare. In fact, school-based teaching research has a good driving and guiding role for teachers, especially new teachers. Enable them to quickly enter the state of teaching work. School-based training can take various forms, the most common of which include collective lesson preparation, course evaluation, case studies, and teaching reflection. These are also the simplest and most effective teaching and research activities that can promote the professional development of teachers. However, many rural schools are also unwilling to implement this low-cost and high return form of teaching and research activities. Ultimately, it is because they do not attach enough importance to the professional development of teachers.

3. Research on Strategies for Improving the Professional Development Level of Rural Primary School Teachers

3.1 Rural teachers should enhance their awareness of independent professional development and enhance their professional literacy

Due to limited development opportunities and platforms, coupled with insufficient material and spiritual incentives, many rural teachers have a weak sense of professional development and do not focus on self-improvement. The current "double reduction" work is in full swing in the field of compulsory education, and the "double reduction" policy has brought new opportunities and challenges to teachers' work. This requires teachers to have a deeper awareness of the importance of their professional development, and to improve themselves to welcome this major change in the field of education. The task of "double reduction" focuses on playing the main role of schools in education, achieving quality and efficiency improvement in school education, and moving from simple "education score" to extensive "education of people". By improving the level of classroom teaching, homework management, and after-school services, students can achieve comprehensive development. If we want to improve the level of classroom teaching, we have put forward higher requirements for teachers' lesson preparation. Teachers cannot just carry books to class, because in class, teachers need to ensure the completion of teaching content and reserve a certain amount of time for students to do classroom homework. For students' homework, teachers should not only ensure the quality of homework and achieve the purpose of reviewing and consolidating, but also strictly control the quantity and firmly resist adding extra burden to students. Teachers should not only ensure the teaching of the school's designated class hours, but also ensure the high-quality completion of after-school services. These have all brought significant challenges to the work of teachers. Faced with these difficulties and challenges, if teachers continue to hesitate and actively improve their professional development level, they will inevitably fall behind the pace of educational development and become stagnant and difficult to make progress.

3.2 Rural teachers should establish a lifelong learning concept and cultivate learning abilities

As a rural teacher, one cannot always excuse oneself for various reasons and avoid opportunities for proactive improvement. The burden borne by rural teachers is not lighter than that of urban teachers, and due to the varying sources of students, the challenges posed to rural teachers are even heavier. Therefore, rural teachers should continuously improve their own qualities and seek opportunities to promote their professional development. One important way is to establish a learning mindset and cultivate learning abilities. Firstly, we need to deeply study the Party's educational policies and guidelines. Rural teachers need to carry out learning and discussion in accordance with

the requirements of the Central Education Work Leading Group's Notice on Deepening Learning and Implementing the Party's Education Policy. A profound understanding of the Party's educational policy is the integration of the experience of the Party's leadership in educational work over the past century. It is an innovative achievement that combines Marxist educational ideas with China's reality, and is the fundamental guide for the development of education. Rural teachers ought to deeply grasp the spiritual essence of the Party's educational policy, including the goal direction of "cultivating what kind of people", the method path of "how to cultivate people", and the value orientation of "cultivating people for whom". They also need to integrate the Party's educational policies with vivid practices in building a high-quality education system, and promote the implementation of the Party's educational policies in detail. Secondly, it is necessary to strengthen the learning of the national common language. The Opinions of the General Office of the State Council on Comprehensively Strengthening the Work of Language and Writing in the New Era point out that it is necessary to enhance the standardization, standardization, and informatization level of language and writing, and vigorously improve the core literacy and teaching ability of teachers in the national universal language and writing. In fact, whether it is various training and learning or various books, they are presented in the form of the national common language, and learning a common language has always been very necessary. However, due to limited conditions, rural teachers, especially ethnic minority teachers, still lack standardized mastery and use of the national language. Therefore, taking advantage of the implementation of unified teaching materials, rural teachers themselves should also enhance their ability and level of using the national common language and writing through continuous learning.

3.3 The government and education authorities should increase policy and financial support for rural schools

In various policy documents related to education, the Party Central Committee and the State Council have always emphasized the need to strengthen the construction of rural teacher teams. The most crucial aspect of this is that the government should ensure the funding of rural schools and provide financial support to rural teachers. Premier Li Keqiang pointed out during the State Council executive meeting that it is necessary to strengthen the protection of rural teachers' treatment and strictly implement the regulation that the average salary income level of teachers in compulsory education should not be lower than that of local civil servants. We should increase the standard of teaching age allowance, and tilt the verification of performance-based pay towards small-scale rural schools and schools in difficult and remote areas. Rural schools are already in a difficult situation due to the scarcity of students, and even those small funds cannot be disbursed in a timely and sufficient manner. The shortage of funds has always been a major obstacle factor for rural schools to achieve further development. Therefore, the government must implement funding guarantees for rural schools. While appropriately improving the funding standards for rural schools, establish a strict supervision and approval system to ensure that rural school funds are not diverted or misappropriated, and strictly ensure that rural school funds are indeed used in daily school affairs. Of course, while ensuring that the funds for rural schools are fully implemented, it is also necessary to ensure that the benefits and allowances for rural teachers are in line with the labor they have put in. The current salary level of rural teachers has significantly increased compared to the past, and is almost the same as that of urban teachers. However, rural teachers are far from comparable to urban teachers in terms of performance and welfare benefits. In addition, as most rural teachers are non-locals, their monthly commuting costs are also quite high. These factors all lead to a lower sense of happiness and satisfaction among rural teachers. Therefore, increasing the subsidy standards for rural teachers and increasing financial support for rural teachers is also an important task.

3.4 Rural schools should attach importance to the professional development of teachers and carry out various teaching and research activities

The professional development process of teachers is long and needs to be continuously continued. Teachers should promote their professional development through continuous learning and in-depth practice. In this process, schools can play a huge role by carrying out various teaching and research activities, creating a strong learning atmosphere, and helping teachers improve their learning. Firstly, within the campus, the school leadership can guide the establishment of a teacher learning community. Give full play to the role of backbone teachers in demonstrating, leading, and radiating, and promote collaborative learning among teachers. In rural schools, experienced teachers with rich teaching experience are often overlooked, and their strength and value have not yet been effectively developed. Schools can use their knowledge to carry out school-based self-training, and then combine the successful experience of excellent teachers to formulate standards for school education and teaching work. ^[4]We should pay attention to giving full play to the leading role of old teachers, implement the Qinglan Project, and through the "mentoring" of old teachers, enable young teachers to grow rapidly in a short period of time, becoming excellent teachers who are capable of teaching and have excellent academic levels. This is particularly crucial for newly hired young teachers. Many rural schools do not pay much attention to the guidance and training of new teachers. Let new teachers who have no teaching experience directly get started and teach in their own way. Without guidance from others, these new teachers are unable to promptly identify their own problems, making their teaching methods difficult to be accepted by students in the short term, thereby harming their interests. Therefore, it is very important to establish a teacher learning community within rural schools and promote the concept of "using the old to lead the new".

Secondly, the school's teaching department should be based on each subject group as a unit or can also break group restrictions to carry out teaching and research activities. The integration of teaching and research is the process in which teachers pursue the essence of the subject they are teaching. Teachers can jointly study curriculum standards, textbooks, teaching behavior, student learning behavior, and the work of class teachers, and write teaching research papers, teaching essays, and teaching reflections. In addition, one can also achieve "learning by doing" through extensive practice by collectively honing lessons, honing questions, honing papers, preparing lessons, listening to lessons, and evaluating lessons, so as to effectively improve oneself. Currently, most schools' teaching and research activities are carried out in the form of collective lesson preparation, listening, and evaluation. Practice has proven that this is the simplest, easiest, and most effective way. Through collective lesson preparation, one can brainstorm and find the most suitable teaching method for relevant teaching content. By listening to and evaluating lessons, one can absorb the teaching wisdom of others, reflect on one's own teaching behavior, and thus promote one's professional development.

4. Conclusion

The issue of professional development of rural teachers is of profound significance. At present, although the professional development level of rural teachers in China has greatly improved compared to the past, there are still problems of uneven development and low level. Analyzing the reasons can be explored from both internal and external perspectives. The internal reason is that the teacher's professional development awareness is not strong or their abilities are insufficient. The external reasons include the coercion of the entire social environment, and insufficient attention from the government, education administrative departments, and schools; Although external factors are significant influencing factors, internal factors are fundamental to the development and changes of affairs, and the powerful role of internal factors should be valued.

If we want to improve the professional development level of rural teachers, we should also

prescribe medicine from multiple perspectives such as teachers themselves, rural schools, governments, and education administrative departments. We need to increase policy and financial support for rural schools, provide more training opportunities and platforms for rural teachers to showcase and improve, tap into the intrinsic motivation of teachers themselves, and take multiple measures to stimulate their work enthusiasm and enthusiasm. Due to my limited abilities, I have not consciously analyzed the issue of professional development of rural teachers deeply enough. During the research, there was a relatively insufficient theoretical reserve and many practical limitations, which are all regrettable aspects of this study. I hope to expand theoretical reserves, improve research results, and complete unfinished tasks in future research.

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